



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 8
Phone 800-227-8917
<http://www.epa.gov/region08>



POPLAR MONTANA GROUNDWATER CONTAMINATION FACT SHEET

OVERVIEW

- EPA has determined that brine from the East Poplar oilfield has begun to reach the Poplar, MT municipal water supply wells.
- EPA has determined through sampling that the quality of the treated water from the Poplar public water supply is safe to drink at this time.
- EPA is issuing an order to three oil companies and communicating with the City of Poplar and Ft. Peck tribes to assure a continued safe drinking water supply for Poplar public water supply consumers.

KEY QUESTIONS

Is my drinking water safe?

If you are using drinking water from the Poplar public water supply, yes. If you have a private water well, it is generally up to you to monitor your water quality. In response to the brine contamination, EPA is issuing an order requiring the responsible parties to pay for sampling of private well water quality within a prescribed area at the request of the private well owner.

What is contaminating the groundwater?

Produced brine is highly saline wastewater extracted during oil and gas production. Several brine plumes are found in the aquifer underlying the East Poplar oilfield. New information shows that the City of Poplar's public water supply wells contain some of the produced brine, though the treated drinking water is safe at this time.

How did the groundwater become contaminated?

The produced brine contamination is related to historic oil production practices in East Poplar oilfield. Oil production began here in 1952 and continues today. Decades ago, brine water extracted with oil was disposed of using unlined surface pits and discharge to the surface. EPA is aware of four different ways the contamination reached the groundwater:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| (1) Use of unlined disposal pits | (3) Failures of buried pipeline and tanks |
| (2) Spills | (4) At least one leaking plugged oil well |

Who is responsible for contaminating the groundwater?

Oil production companies that operated production wells in the East Poplar Oilfield in the past. These companies are Murphy Exploration & Production Co., Pioneer Natural Resources USA, Inc., and Samson Hydrocarbons Co.

What is EPA doing about the groundwater contamination?

EPA's primary goal is to assure that safe drinking water is provided to the public in and around Poplar, MT now and in the future. EPA has issued an order to responsible parties to provide the following:

- (1) Increased water quality monitoring for the city of Poplar's public water supply and private groundwater wells in and around Poplar
- (2) Adequate treatment of or an alternative to the current drinking water source for Poplar and surrounding private residences within a prescribed area if quality of the current source presents a public health risk
- (3) A study of the Poplar, MT groundwater contamination and assessment of remediation options.